

HOW TO APPLY FOR AND USE



FOOD STAMP BENEFITS



Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services

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HOW TO APPLY FOR AND USE FOOD STAMP BENEFITS

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INTRODUCTION

The Food Stamp Program provides food stamp benefits that help low-income households buy the food they need for good health.

The amount of food stamp benefits each household receives is based on the Thrifty Food Plan. This is the model diet plan the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses to project the cost of food for one month for different household sizes.

This pamphlet contains general Food Stamp Program information. The information answers common questions about how to apply for and use food stamp benefits.

If you would like more information or have specific questions about your case, contact your local community services office (CSO).



ELIGIBILITY

Do I qualify for food stamp benefits?

You may qualify for food stamp benefits if you:

- Have little or no income;
- Are unemployed or work part time;
- Work for low wages;
- Receive public assistance payments;
- Are elderly or disabled and live on a small income; or
- Have limited resources.

How much food stamp benefits will I receive if I am eligible?

The amount of food stamp benefits you receive depends upon income, allowable expenses, and the number of people in your household.

Food stamp benefits are only intended to be part of the food budget. Most households must spend some of their own cash along with their food stamp benefits in order to buy enough food for a month.



APPLICATION

How do I get an application?

Your local community services office gives you a Food Stamp Application form on the same day you ask for one.

You can ask for it:

- In person;
- By phone; or
- Someone else may get one for you.

When do I turn in the application?

Turn in your application as soon as possible.

- If you qualify, benefits start from the date you turn in your application.
- If you qualify, you receive food stamp benefits within 30 days
- The local office will set an appointment date for you to see an interviewer.

What if I need Food Stamp benefits right away?

If your household has little or no money and needs help right away, you may qualify for expedited service. If eligible, you will get food stamp benefits within five days.



INTERVIEW

What happens at the interview?

At the interview, the worker:

- Explains the program rules;
- Helps you complete any parts of the application you have not filled in;
- Asks you for proof of certain information provided;
- Gives you a copy of your rights and responsibilities;
- Tells you if you must register for work; and
- Explains anything you don't understand.

Where is the interview held?

Most food stamp interviews are held in the community services office. If you cannot get to the office, someone who knows your circumstances can apply and be interviewed for you.

Call the office if you cannot find someone to go for you. If you qualify, you may be interviewed in your home or over the phone.

PROOF REQUIRED

What proofs should I bring to the interview?

You are required to show papers proving household's statements. We need that proof to make a decision on your application.

You should have the following proof for your interview:

- Identity;
- Address-Where you live. If you have no address, tell the community services office where you stay;
- Who lives in your household;
- Income-For all household members.

Will the worker ask me for more information?

You will be asked for more proof if any of the following applies to your household:

- **Immigration status**-legal alien status for each alien household member;
- **Current utility bills**-if you claim utility costs;
- **Costs for babysitting, day care, or attendant care**-while searching for a job, training for work, or working;
- **Medical expenses**-non-reimbursed costs over \$35 per month for any person 60 years of age or older or disabled;
- **Disability**;
- **Income and resources of an alien's sponsor**; or
- **Unclear or questionable information.**

WHAT IS YOUR WASHINGTON EBT QUEST CARD?

Now there is a **safe, convenient, and easy** way for you to get your cash and food benefits each month. It is called the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT system). You get your benefits from the system using your Washington EBT QUEST card.



◀ Your Card Number

Your Signature ▶



- Food and cash benefits are issued through the DSHS Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system.

With your EBT QUEST Card:

- You will not get paper checks or food stamp coupons.
- Your benefits will be put in an account set up for you.
- You must use the card to get your benefits.

Note: *The card will not change the amount of benefits you receive. The rules for using your benefits have not changed.*

WHEN CAN YOU USE YOUR EBT BENEFITS?

The day of the month you get your cash and/or food benefits will not change.

Food Benefits

If your Assistance Unit (AU) Number ends in:	Your food benefits are available after 7:00 a.m. on the:
1	1st of mo.
2	2nd of mo.
3	3rd of mo.
4	4th of mo.
5	5th of mo.
6	6th of mo.
7	7th of mo.
8	8th of mo.
9	9th of mo.
0	10th of mo.

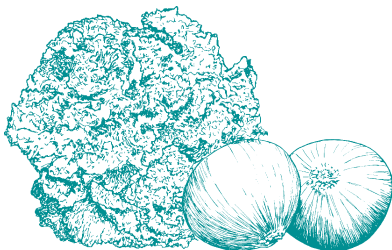
The day your food benefits are available to you is printed on your approval notice for food benefits. You may also contact your local DSHS office to find out when your benefits will be available each month.

Cash Benefits

Your cash benefits are available after 7:00 a.m on the:

1st of every month

- Your benefits are available on weekends and holidays.
- Any benefits you have not spent by the end of the month are carried over to the next month.



WHAT IS AN EBT PIN?

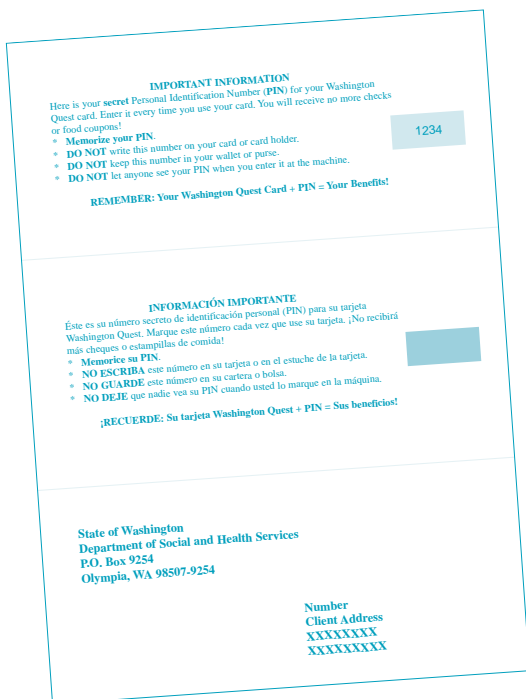
Every time you use your card, you must enter 4 secret numbers. These numbers are called a:

PIN (Personal Identification Number)

**** = PIN (4 secret numbers)

These are the ways to get a PIN:

- If you get your card at your local DSHS office you will choose your PIN at that time.
- If the card is sent to you through the mail – you will receive your PIN in the mail within a few days.



Do not throw it away! You need these 4 numbers and your card to get your benefits.

ALTERNATE CARD HOLDER

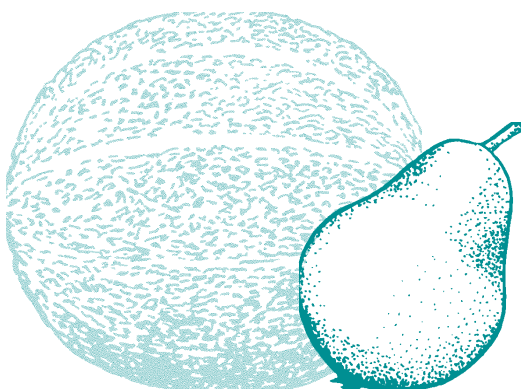
You may choose someone else to help you use your benefits. This person is called an Alternate Card Holder.

The Alternate Card Holder

- Is chosen by you.
- Will receive their own Washington QUEST card and PIN at a local DSHS office
- Will be able to spend your benefits.

If you choose someone to be your Alternate Card Holder, choose a person you trust. Remember, lost or stolen benefits will not be replaced.

For more information or to get an authorization form, call your local DSHS Office.



WHEN TO CALL EBT CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer Service Automated Response Unit (ARU)

1-888-328-9271

TTY State Relay Number: 1-800-833-8388

Braille TTY State Relay Number:
1-800-833-6385

Call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week toll free when:

- You need to know the balance in your food or cash account.
- Your card is lost, stolen, or damaged. The ARU will transfer you to a Customer Service Representative.
- You want to hear your last 10 transactions for your cash or food benefit account.
- You want a replacement card or PIN by mail. The ARU will transfer you to a Customer Service Representative.

Customer Service Representatives can also help you:

- Find a place nearby where you can use your card.
- Get a 2-month history of your transactions.
- Report problems with ATMs.
- If you speak a language other than English.

BEFORE YOU MOVE

Do not risk losing your benefits!

- Call your local DSHS office immediately with your new address.
- If you intend to move out of state, you should convert your EBT food benefits to Food Stamp coupons, and withdraw all of your cash benefits before leaving. Contact your local DSHS Office to find out how to convert your EBT food benefits to coupons.



IT'S THE LAW

Misuse of your Washington QUEST card is a state and federal crime!

- It is a crime to defraud the system or to sell your card and PIN to others.
- Repeated loss of your card may result in a special investigation of your case.



Use your benefits on time

If you do not use at least some of your benefits within a 90 day period they will not be available to you. If this happens, you will need to call your local DSHS Office to get those benefits back. If you do not use at least some of your benefits within 270 days, the benefits will be cancelled and may not be replaced.

FREQUENTLY ASKED EBT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: *If you forget your card when you go to the store, can you still buy things?*

A: No. You cannot use your benefits without your card.

Q: *Can you use your EBT card out of state?*

A: The Washington QUEST card is accepted by many participating stores in Idaho, Arizona, Colorado, Alaska and Hawaii. Stores in other states may or may not be participating in an EBT program. Look for the QUEST sign at out-of-state stores. Check with the store before trying to use your QUEST card. In some cases, the store may choose to honor the QUEST card even though they are not a QUEST merchant. Out-of-state stores that sell food may or may not participate as providers of cash benefits. ATM access out-of-state will depend upon whether the ATM is operating as part of the Quest network. Cash access is therefore not guaranteed out of state.

Q: *What if a transaction was taken out of the wrong benefit? For example: if you wanted to pay for food using food benefits, but the store clerk selected the cash benefit?*

A: Return to the same store and have the store re-enter the purchase using the correct benefit account. The store will then either credit the other account for the incorrect charge or (for cash benefits only) give you cash.

Q: Can you return a purchase made with your card?

A: Yes! For example: if milk is spoiled, you can bring the spoiled milk and the receipt back to the store. Your food account is credited for the return. You will not receive cash for the return if the item was purchased using your food benefits.

Q: When will I get my food benefits each month?

A: Food benefits are deposited into EBT accounts over the first 10 days of each month. The day your food benefits will be available to you is based on the last number of your Food Assistance Unit (AU) number. For example, if your food AU number ends in a 5, your food benefits will be available to you on the 5th day of each month.

The day your benefits are available to you is printed on your food benefits approval notice. You may also contact your local DSHS office to find out when your monthly benefits will be available to you.

Q: How do I use or get cash back from my EBT cash benefits?

A: You can use your card at stores with POS machines to make purchases from your cash account. At many locations you can also purchase Money Orders for larger expenses such as rent. Money Orders are safer than carrying cash and usually cost less than ATM surcharges and fees. Some stores allow cash back with a purchase. Check with the store for their cash back policy.

You may also withdraw cash from your cash account at ATM machines that show the QUEST sign.

REPORTING CHANGES

Who has to report changes as they happen?

All food stamp benefits households.

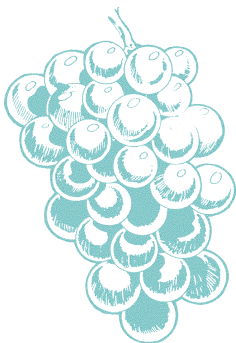
What kind of changes do I have to report?

As a food stamp benefits household, you must report:

- Changes in the source of your income;
- Changes in your address and resulting changes in rent or mortgage amount;
- Changes in resources such as bank accounts, houses or land;
- Changes in the amount of your income if the change is over \$25;
- Changes in your household composition such as people moving in or out;
- Changes in the number of licensed vehicles you have; and
- The end of a temporary disability if the temporary disability was the reason your vehicle was not considered as a resource.

How do I report these changes?

- In writing;
- By telephone; or
- In person

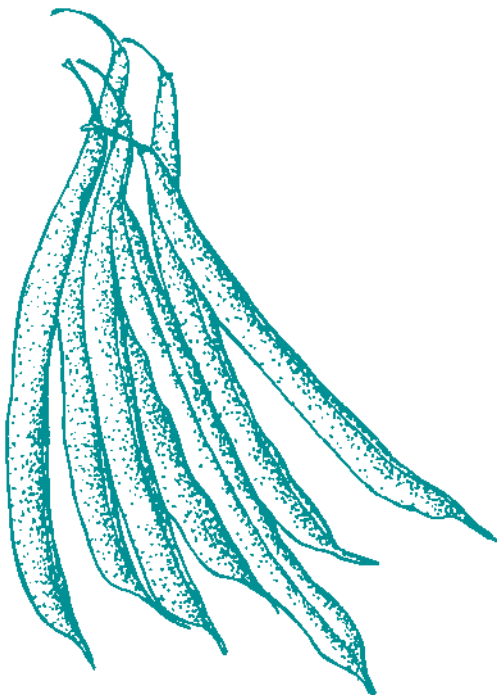


What happens if the changes I report result in a change in my food stamp benefits?

You will be told in writing how the change affects your food stamp benefits.

If you do not agree, you may talk to your financial worker, a supervisor or the community services office administrator.

If you still do not agree, you may ask for a Fair Hearing.



RECERTIFICATION

What is recertification?

Recertification means reapplying for food stamp benefits before the end of your present certification period and getting approved for a new certification period.

When should I reapply?

When you are approved (certified) for fewer than two months, your award letter will tell you when to reapply.

When you are approved (certified) for more than two months, you will get a notice that tells you exactly when your food stamp benefits will stop. The notice is sent about 45 days before your food stamp benefits actually stop. The Eligibility Review form or Application for Benefits form will be included with this notice.

How do I complete the recertification process?

Complete and return the form to your local community services office (CSO). You will be given an appointment for an interview. You must complete this appointment to find out if you are eligible to receive more food stamp benefits.

Bring any verification you think you may need with you. The worker will decide what is required during the interview. At the end of the interview, you will receive a letter informing you of the action taken on your reapplication.

The letter will tell you:

- If you are eligible;
- How many months in your recertification period; and
- How many food stamp benefits you will receive.

What if I am unable to attend the interview?

You can name an authorized representative - someone who knows your situation and can act for you. The authorized representative can attend the interview for you.

If you cannot name an authorized representative, let the CSO know. The CSO staff will contact you to complete a telephone interview or make a home visit.



Discrimination is prohibited in all programs and activities administered by the Department of Social & Health Services. No one shall be excluded from these programs and activities on the basis of race, color, creed, political beliefs, national origin, religion, age, sex or disability.